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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of an electronic community to support teachers educators in their instructional technology (IT) curriculum. Teacher educators were enthusiastic about the project, since the most important facet of IT teacher education was to integrate technology into the classroom. IT teacher educators understood the importance of e-mail communication in creating an electronic community so they could communicate regularly with each other and share course information. The teacher educators were given identical laptop computer systems to use in preparing for classes, presentations, and communicating with one another. The IT services division had a home page on the World Wide Web that gave an overview of the division and the various technology documents that supported the IT teacher education curriculum. The home page could serve as a single location for a clearinghouse of accepted activities for trainers to supplement the IT curriculum; an idea forum for IT teacher educators; individual module and course electronic community web-based discussion groups; and scheduled online meetings. This paper lists a series of goals, objectives, and activities that training coordinators could utilize to promote use of and centrally organize the electronic community. (SM)

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Creating an Electronic Community of Teacher Educators in Richland County (SC) School District One to Support the Instructional Technology Teacher Education Curriculum

April, 1998

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Creating an Electronic Community of Teacher Educators in Richland County (SC) School District One to Support the Instructional Technology Teacher Education Curriculum

April, 1998.

Instructional Technology (IT) Services is a division of Richland One's Information Resource Management Division. The department's major responsibilities center on the development and provision of technology training programs, professional development planning for building level information technology specialists (media specialists) and general oversight of school library media programs. Telecommunications services including television production, satellite and instructional television programming, and broadcast complete the department's district responsibilities. A professional staff provides coordination and leadership for department initiatives. Facilities at both the district and building levels host training opportunities and facilitate program implementation.

The IT services division also provides support for 13 IT teacher educators. The teacher educators provide instruction of IT modules and courses to support the recertification and continuing education needs of teachers in the district. Modules range from 3-20 hours and courses are 45 hours. The students (K-12 teachers in the district) are graded on a pass/fail basis, must attend class 80% of the time the class is taught, and successfully complete all assignments to earn credit. Each module and course follows competencies supplied by the IT services division. Modules and classes are taught throughout the school year and for a three week period during the summer months. Most of the IT classes are taught in various high school computer labs throughout the district.

Recently, I attended an IT teacher educator's meeting at which Mr. Jim Hockman, IT training coordinator for the district, presided to organize and plan for the next year's series of

modules and courses. Paperwork standards, t-shirts for IT teacher educators and troubleshooting tips were discussed. Most importantly, the idea of an electronic community among teacher educators was presented.

The last item on the meeting agenda was distribution of laptops. As the last item approached, one could sense from the teacher educators the feeling a child gets upon awaking Christmas morning to open gifts. At the end of the meeting, each teacher educator was given a DELL™ laptop with the following specifications: 200 MHz Pentium Processor, 2.1 GB hard drive, active matrix screen, PCMCIA Ethernet/33.6 Modem card, 12x CD-ROM drive, and most importantly, a black carrying case.

During the meeting, the teacher educators were asked to discuss the need and importance of having an electronic community among them to support their curriculum. Immediately ideas flowed. It was mentioned the most important facet of IT teacher education is to integrate technology into the classroom. The integration of technology (specifically, software programs that use sorting, indexing, data manipulation functions, etc.) into the classroom can promote the higher learning skills needed in today's technology-driven society. Through the teacher educators, this must be emphasized to the teachers.

The aspects of e-mail communication in the creation of an electronic community for the IT teacher educators were recognized. Creating either a listserv or e-mail distribution list for the educators to communicate on a more regular basis to each other and to the district IT services division would provide a more widely usable mechanism for the dissemination of curriculum related documents and collaboration of ideas to support the curriculum. IT teacher educators would be able to easily share the handouts electronically they use for their modules and courses that supplement the selected text. 'Reinventing the wheel' would no longer be a factor.

In a similar situation at the University of Melbourne in Australia, a bulletin board system (BBS) provided an additional medium of communication for the students and staff of the Graduate Diploma in Information and Communication Technology Education. An assessment was made of how these students coped with the use of a BBS in the form of a 12-item survey which was conducted to 66 students who participated in the course. The survey attempted to determine the level of student involvement in the use of the BBS; identify the students' major concerns; and pinpoint student cognition and satisfaction. It was also intended to institute the need for suitable resources to ensure more effective integration of technology, specifically in the use of electronic community communications for future program planning. The most recurrent criticism of the program by the students was that not enough time was given for familiarization with the technology. Overall, the survey found a very positive response to the use of electronic communications, provided that a high level of technical support is available. (Lee)

The idea of creating an electronic community among the IT teacher educators if nothing than for the ease and expediency of communication should be supported. Communication can be the most important factor for successful teamwork and consistency in this form of distributive teacher education. Making certain that specific policies and procedures for use of communication tools for the electronic community must be created and use promoted by the training coordinator. Actively posting messages or distributing memoranda electronically are ways of keeping an electronic community alive. I have noticed that some listservs can become stagnant possibly due to the purpose of the discussion topic but a single message posting asking for help or disseminating information quickly revitalizes its use.

Next, the portability factor of laptops was mentioned. IT teacher educators are now able to utilize the laptops to prepare for classes and presentations in various lab settings. This will

alleviate the difficulty of being presented with learning various computer lab training PC configurations which are invariably slightly to excessively reconfigured at each location. Now, IT teacher educators have the consistency of functioning in a familiar PC environment at different training facilities.

Lastly, the discussion turned to greater accessibility to the World Wide Web. The IT services division has a home page on the Web which gives an overview of the division and various technology documents that support the IT teacher education curriculum. Links are available to the district's Technology + Learning Conference brochure, Acceptable Use Policy, Guidelines for Student Use of the Internet, Technology Competencies for Instructional Personnel, training schedule, Electronic Resource Policy and Guidelines, hardware standards, and three PowerPoint presentations on the IT training proposal, bond update, and general IT services. (Richland One home page)

More wide-spread use of the division's home page will occur since the introduction of laptops supporting the idea of an electronic community. As an addition to electronic communication among the IT teacher trainers via e-mail, the IT services division home page can serve as a single location for: a clearinghouse of accepted activities for trainers to supplement the IT curriculum, an idea area (forum) for IT teacher educators, individual module and course electronic community web-based discussion groups, and scheduled online meetings using free Java chatroom technology for (web-based using Parachat™) may be held. (Parachat Web Site)

A similar, successful web site is the Teacher Talk Forum at the Center for Adolescent Studies at Indiana University. The Teacher Talk Forum is designed to promote communication and use of resources for lesson plans, professional development, teacher references, Internet fieldtrips and museums, technology in the classroom, and references for kids. An adaptation of

the information contained at this web site could be suitable to replicate for the IT teacher educators to facilitate interactivity among them.

A series of goals, objectives and activities could be utilized by the training coordinator to promote use of and centrally organize the electronic community:

Goals:

- To prepare IT teacher educators to become active participants in communicating electronically in the electronic community.
- To prepare IT teacher educators to maintain a consistent presentation format for modules and courses within the electronic community.
- To provide a solid and comprehensive educational forum for IT teacher educators to promote higher levels of critical thinking skills for teacher education.

Objectives:

- The IT teacher educator understands the major concepts and assumptions of e-mail/listserv communication within the electronic community.
- The IT teacher educator understands how training facilities differ in their configurations and creates consistency for presentations that can be adapted to training facilities regardless of current configuration.
- The IT teacher educator understands the creation process and utilization of a web based forum to create a learning environment that encourages exchange of ideas and active engagement in teacher education.

Activities:

- Centrally activate an e-mail distribution list to be disseminated among IT teacher educators.
- Centrally activate a listserv to which IT teacher educators can subscribe.
- Centrally provide training for IT teacher educators for consistent hardware and software configuration of laptops.
- Centrally provide training for current configurations of utilized training labs in the district.
- Centrally create a web page forum devoted to the needs of IT teacher educators.

Utilizing their enthusiasm, energy, and reliability, the IT teacher educators in Richland One School District must attain a certain level of content and procedural knowledge, and exhibit use of the tools that constitute an electronic community. The end in view is to prepare teachers in the district who are motivated to enhance the achievement of the learner, produce better and more technologically adept teachers and learners, and ultimately prepare the learner for a constantly changing technology based society.

Resources:

Hockman, Jim, Richland District One IT services division training coordinator. Columbia, SC. Various personal interviews. March/April 1998.

Lee, Kar-Tin. Factors Affecting Teachers and Trainers in the Use of a Bulletin Board System: A Report. 6p.; In: Learning Technologies: Prospects and Pathways. Selected papers from EdTech '96 Biennial Conference of the Australian Society for Educational Technology (Melbourne, Australia, July 7-10, 1996).

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